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The Annual Round of Agricultural Tasks in Dongyang County Synoptic Illusion or Symbolic Capital?

Abstract

This paper examines the annual round of agricultural tasks in Dongyang County, Zhejiang Province, as synopsized by rural farmers in the twenty-four solar terms *jieqi*. Such an examination inevitably entails a review of Chinese concepts of time, which in turn provides an occasion to respond to the claim that while “anthropologists have documented the relativity of concepts of time in different cultures... they have been less assiduous about observing a plurality of times within the same social formation” (RUTZ 1992, 2). After a brief historical and geographic introduction to Dongyang County, the paper surveys the variety of time frames in which ritual, agricultural, commercial, and festival activities are reckoned in the county. The analysis contextualizes ethnographic and ethnohistoric data from Dongyang in relation to a variety of theoretical claims put forward by anthropologists who have addressed the issue of understanding time cross-culturally. The paper presents the agricultural and ritual activities of Dongyang County appropriate to the fifteen day periods marked off by each solar term. It concludes by considering BOURDIEU’s critique of the very act of compiling synoptic calendars (1977), and by answering that critique with support from the work of Alfred GELL (1992).

Keywords: rural China—agricultural tasks—time—calendars—longevity

There is no fairy land where people experience time in a way that is markedly unlike the way in which we do ourselves.... [Places] where there is no past, present and future, where time stands still, or chases its own tail, or swings back and forth like a pendulum... are all travesties, engendered in the process of scholarly reflection. There are only other clocks, other schedules to keep abreast of, other frustrating delays, happy anticipations, unexpected turns of events and long stretches of grinding monotony.

—Alfred Gell, *The Anthropology of Time*

THIS PAPER EXAMINES the annual round of agricultural tasks in Dongyang County, Zhejiang Province, as synopsised by rural farmers in the twenty-four solar terms (*jieqi* 節氣; see Appendix).¹ While I am not the first to engage in such a venture, it has been many years since FEI (1939) called attention to the significance of the solar terms in the Chinese chronological scheme. In the intervening years, a variety of transformations in the organization of agricultural production have occurred, which make the enduring salience of the terms all the more worthy of re-examination.

Such a reexamination inevitably entails a review of Chinese concepts of time, which in turn provides an occasion to respond to RUTZ's claim that while "anthropologists have documented the relativity of concepts of time in different cultures... they have been less assiduous about observing a plurality of times within the same social formation" (1992, 2). Given the variety of time frames in which ritual, agricultural, commercial, industrial, and festival activities are reckoned in China, one might well characterize it as the multichronous culture par excellence (FEI 1939, 148–53).

After providing a brief geographic introduction to Dongyang County, this paper gives attention to the multichronous character of Chinese civilization of which the solar terms are one manifestation. It contextualizes materials from Dongyang in relation to a variety of theoretical claims put forward by anthropologists who have addressed the issue of understanding time cross-culturally. The paper then moves on to summarize the agricultural activities of Dongyang County appropriate to the fifteen-day periods

marked off by each solar term, and considers some of the changes that have resulted from technological and organizational innovation in recent years. In conclusion, I consider BOURDIEU's critique of the very act of compiling synoptic calendars (1977), and answer that critique with support from the work of Alfred GELL (1992). Finally, I give some consideration to the role of calendars as instruments of political domination.

GEOGRAPHICAL BACKGROUND OF DONGYANG COUNTY

Located in a mountainous region virtually equidistant (ca. 170 km.) from Zhejiang Province's coastal port cities of Hangzhou and Ningbo (see Map 1), Dongyang County was traditionally a land poor area with inadequate grain. With no more than 30% of its total land area arable, scarcity of land has been noted as acute since the mid nineteenth century, when the county's population reached 500,000 people.

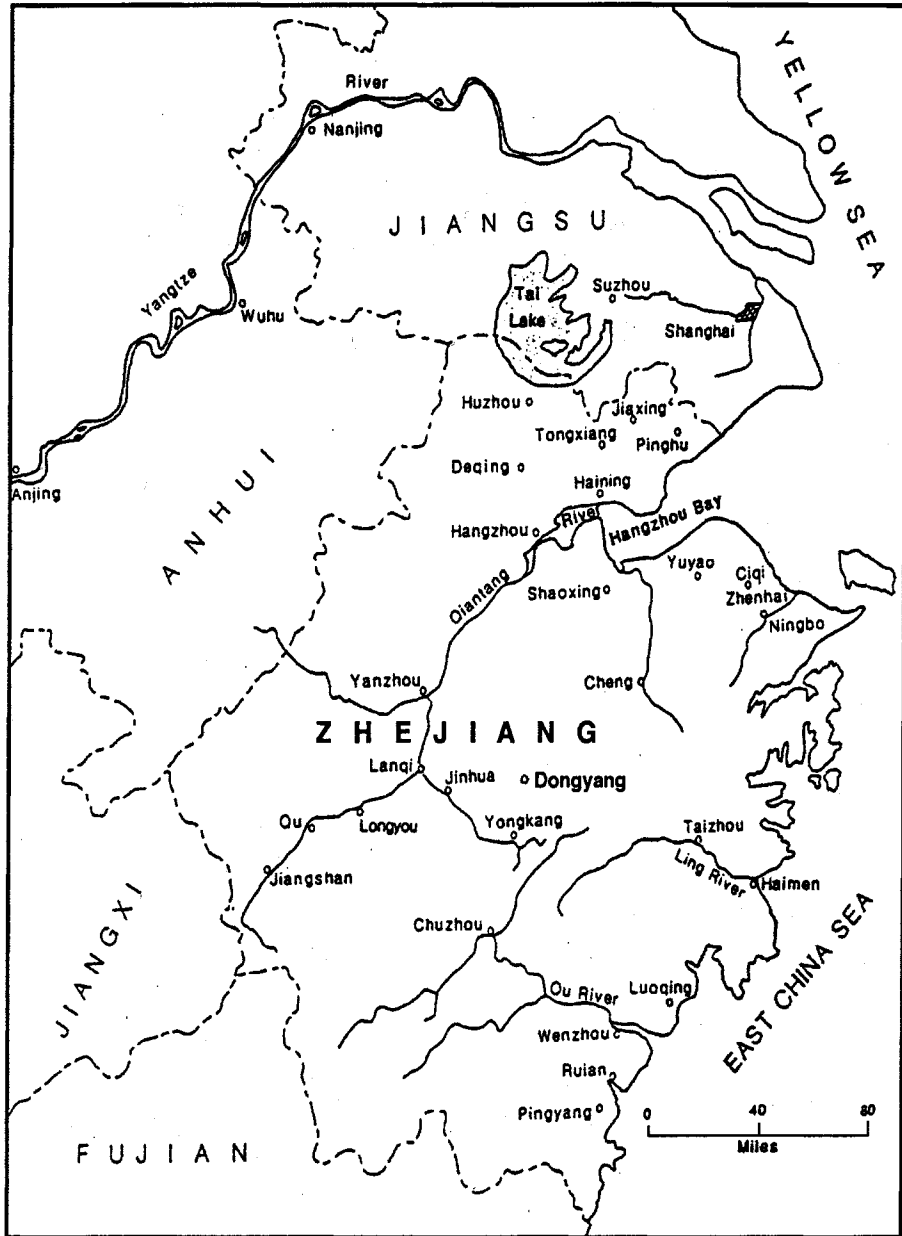
Dongyang County of today is somewhat smaller than in the past. In 1985, two of its mountainous eastern districts were divided off into a separate county, Pan An, leaving Dongyang with about one third less territory. Its present area is about 1,740 sq. km., and its population in 1992 was 761,400. The county is divided into 7 districts (*qu* 区), 48 townships or subdistricts (*xiang* 乡), and 1,270 villages (*cun* 村). The two largest towns (*zhen* 镇) are Wuning (the county's capital) and Weishan, with Hengdian, a provincial leader in the development of rural industrial enterprise, a close third (JIANG n.d.).

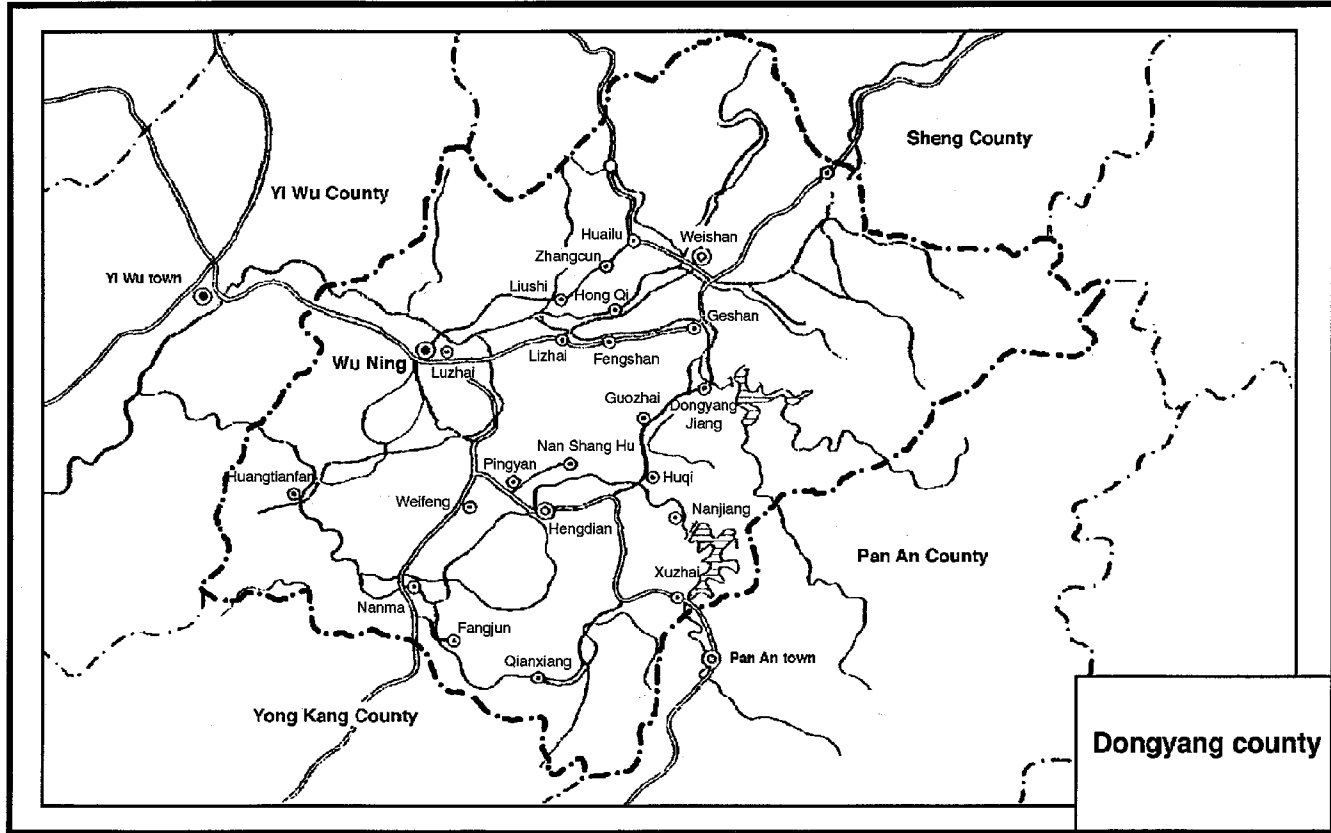
From very early on in the history of Dongyang County, its residents came to rely on migration and sideline occupations outside agriculture to supplement their livelihood, and since the Ming dynasty (1368–1644), Dongyang has enjoyed a reputation as a “county of 100 skills” (*bai gong zhi xiang* 百工之鄉; DYSZ 1993, 3). In addition to purveying their distinctive skills in the relief carving of wood and architectural decoration, Dongyang expatriates also engaged in carpentry, masonry, and other construction trades. Back in the county itself, residents cured the justly famous “Jinhua” hams, wove bamboo and rattan, knitted hosiery, and produced traditional medicinal goods, woven silk, cord and thread, as well as pottery, soap and fireworks.

During late imperial times, Dongyang County was an administrative division of Zhejiang Province's Jinhua 金華 Prefecture, and remained under the prefectural jurisdiction of Jinhua until as recently as 1988 when the Dongyang County town of Wuning was upgraded in administrative status to “city” (*shi* 市), under the direct bureaucratic supervision of provincial authorities.

Geographically, Dongyang is characterized by three distinct economic

Map 1





Map 2

zones (ZJNCDC 1932, 70). The first is a level plain extending eastward from Wuning, which is itself located on the western edge of the county near to the border of Yiwu County (see Map 2). The plain is the county's most productive agricultural area, and the center of its pig husbandry. The pigs are processed into a variety of hams, which differ according to the curing process employed, the season in which they are processed, and the kind of pig from which the meat derives. Roughly one fourth of so-called "Jinhua" hams, which came to enjoy a national reputation during the latter part of the Qing dynasty (1644–1911 AD), are actually produced in Dongyang.

The second economic zone, which lies in an arc further to the east of the county town at a slightly higher elevation, is characterized by extensive silk production centered on the town of Huqi. In this zone the woodcarving centers of the county lie along the arc from southeast to northeast, including the market towns of Hengdian, Nanshanghu, Huqi, Guozhai, Louxizhai, Weishan, Huailu, Zhangcun, and Liushikou and their surrounding villages (see Map 2).

In the third zone, which lies in an arc still further east of the county town, the land becomes mountainous, and the temperatures cooler. Grain production is more difficult, and most of the land that is cultivated is planted in tea and medicinal herbs that do well at higher elevations. This zone also produced the lumber for house construction and woodcarving in traditional times.

The river valleys of the North River and South River create the agricultural plain of Dongyang County in their roughly parallel flow west from the mountains of neighboring Pan An County (elevation 900–1000 m.). After their flow through Dongyang, they converge near the town of Buddhist Hall (Fotangzhen 佛堂鎮) in neighboring Yiwu County, and flow on to the city of Jinhua, as part of the Qian Tang river system (JIANG n.d.).

Dongyang's climate is subtropical monsoonal, averaging 261 frost free days a year and 1,300 to 1,400 mm. of rainfall a year. Rains typically begin in March and April, are heaviest during May and June, and drizzle through July on into September as "plum rains," which occasionally whip up into destructive typhoons.

The county has 506,800 *mu* 畝 of cultivated land, 385,700 *mu* of which are irrigated (1 *mu* = .165 acres). Land below 400 meters in elevation is generally managed for three growing seasons—irrigated fields are planted in wheat/rice/rice or wheat/rice/corn rotation; dry fields are planted in wheat and beans/corn/dry rice rotation. Above 400 meters, wheat and hybrid rice are grown in two ripening seasons. On dry mountain lands, wheat, corn, and sweet potatoes are grown in three ripening seasons. Of subsidiary cash crops the most important are tea leaves, mulberry leaves, fruits of many

kinds, Chinese medicinal herbs, and mat straw, the latter mainly grown on dry land in hilly areas.

CHINESE CONCEPTS OF TIME

Stretching across the centuries in the Chinese chronological scheme is a time frame associated with reckoning the generations of genealogical time, what EVANS-PRITCHARD (1940) would have called "structural time." However, the Chinese are much more precise in their devices for marking the elapse of generations than were the Nuer, for whom, if EVANS-PRITCHARD is to be believed, "the distance between the beginning of the world and the present day remains unalterable" (1940, 108). For Evans-Pritchard, rites of passage represented an aspect of this structural time in that generations of Nuer marched through the rites in age grades whose relative positions one to the other never changed. While there are no formal age grades in Chinese culture, there is a symbolic marking of successive generations in the idiom of genealogy and ritual performance that creates a distinctive Chinese version of structural time in something like Evans-Pritchard's sense.

Each generation in the genealogy of a local Chinese lineage is marked by a successive character in a distinctive lineage poem, still remembered by elderly Dongyang residents, despite the fact that many of the printed genealogies of the past in which they were recorded were destroyed during the cultural revolution (1966–1976). Characters from the poems appear in sequence, generation after generation, in the given names of male lineage members, indicating the generation in the genealogy to which they belong. While the relative positions of the generations one to another remain unalterable, the Chinese have a well developed sense of the remote past, becoming ever more remote. They are, if you will, the quintessential people "with history."

And within each generation, of course, the life cycle rituals of birth, marriage, family division, and death (see COOPER 1998) mark off the inexorable stages in the span of mortal time. One does not need to be a doctrinaire Durkheimian to see the logic of Leach's argument that one very important function of such observances is the ordering of time. For LEACH, the experience of time is an epiphenomenon of the ritualized intervals of social life through which its passage is measured (1961, 135).

The recognition of the limits of mortal time, what Leach has called the "psychologically unpleasant experience of time's irreversibility," is manifest both in Dongyang and China more broadly in the overriding concern for longevity. The Daoist tradition was one in which the quest for immortality was a central motif, and in which measures to extend longevity figured prominently. Such modern-day practices as the consumption of so-called

“longevity” noodles on one’s birthdays clearly resonate with these notions.

Without wishing to make too much out of a noodle, its association with “longevity” suggests a Chinese conception of time quite familiar to Western metaphysics, namely the metaphor of distance measured along an undifferentiated cylinder (a noodle par excellence) extending from the present into the future leaving the past behind. A new apprentice eats longevity noodles at the commencement of his term to signify the hope that his relationship with his master will be a “long” one.

In the popular culture of Dongyang, one is literally bombarded with references to “longevity,” usually as a symbolic or metaphoric means to evoke it in the personal experience of children, parents, relatives, and friends. At one’s birth, the placenta is placed in a clay “longevity bowl” and concealed under one’s bed. One assigns to one’s child, or adopts for oneself, the given name “Changsheng” 長生, “long life,” or names with the character for longevity (*shou* 壽) in them. The latter is also a common motif in the decoration of the home, and counterintuitively, of coffins. At New Year’s, as well as on one’s birthday, one eats “longevity” noodles. Daughters send “longevity couplets” to their parents on every birthday after 50 that marks a new decade of life (e.g., 60, 70, 80). At Qingming festival, “long life pork” is distributed to elders at the conclusion of sacrifices in the ancestral hall. Mothers prepare a “longevity quilt” for their daughters to take along on occasion of marriage. And the Eight Daoist Immortals endure as folk heroes in contemporary popular culture and expressive forms (see COOPER 1999).

This fixation with longevity clearly manifests a practical recognition of the final truth of time’s irreversibility. However, as LEACH has argued, religious dogmas are largely concerned with denying or mystifying this final truth (1961, 125), and this is no less true of Chinese religious practice than of others. Indeed the ritual and paraphernalia of funerals in Dongyang County provide the stepping stone out into a realm of “gods, ghosts, and ancestors.” The ancestors, “those who came before,” still require demonstrations of respect, fealty, piety, and propitiation through gifts of food (see THOMPSON 1988), from “those who come after” (see MEILLASSOUX 1978). WATSON points out that,

One’s social status remained largely unaffected by death... both worlds were dominated by kinship... death did not terminate the [hierarchical] relationships between agnatic kinsmen... [The] notion of continued exchange between living and dead is the foundation of late imperial China’s ideological domain. (1988, 8–9)

Thus while the limits of mortality are clearly acknowledged in popular

cultural concern with longevity, the rituals of death mystify or deny the finality of time's irreversibility, a reminder that hierarchical obligations do not cease even after death.

The lunar calendar and its associated ritual and festival cycle continues to evince great staying power in rural areas in contemporary China. All the dates for rural market fairs, festival celebrations, ritual performances, birthdays, New Year's, etc., are figured according to the lunar calendar in Dongyang, and its dates and rhythms remain part of popular consciousness. The first and the fifteenth of each lunar month are still observed as vegetarian fast days in Dongyang, mainly by elderly women. Indeed, most modern calendars in China are printed to include both lunar and solar dates.

Of course, the traditional lunar time frame has also been overlaid with a perspective deriving from the proletarianized work regime of the expanding rural industrial sector, its labor force increasingly subject to the clock and to the measuring of time by the minute and hour. This experience was not totally new, however, since labor in the former agricultural communes, measured in work points assigned by the day, had already given rural agricultural labor something of a proletarian character. Oddly enough, the household responsibility system introduced during the economic reforms of the 1980s, in which formerly collectivized land was reallocated to individual rural households to manage on their own time, has had the effect of deproletarianizing agricultural labor. However, an expanding percentage of the rural work force now finds employment in light industrial enterprises off the land, and these enterprises carry forward proletarian understandings of the work day in the modern rural landscape.

With a significant segment of Dongyang's adult male population thus absent in wage labor or entrepreneurial activity for most of the year, household agricultural tasks in Dongyang have fallen to the elderly, women, or even hired labor. The state levies fines on land left fallow, so day-to-day management of agricultural tasks must be performed by household members left behind, or the land sublet to a neighbor or relative to tend and meet compulsory purchase quotas of the state.

During agricultural busy seasons, rural enterprises close down, and able bodied males return for two or three weeks twice each year to lend a hand with harvest and planting. Thus the proletarianized work regime of the enterprises is still circumscribed by agricultural concerns and rhythms.²

In Chinese cosmology, years accumulate in sixty-year cycles, the result of the permutation of the "ten heavenly stems and twelve earthly branches" (*tiangan dizhi* 天干地支). The twelve earthly branches are each associated with the more widely known twelve animals that characterize successive years in a twelve-year cycle—rat, ox, tiger, hare, dragon, snake, horse, sheep,

monkey, cock, dog, and pig. One's sixtieth birthday, which completes the permutational cycle of stems and branches, is particularly noteworthy and the occasion for a "celebration of longevity." Each branch also marks a distinctive two-hour period of the twenty-four-hour day.

It is GEERTZ's (1973) treatment of a similar kind of "permutational" calendar in the time reckoning system of the Balinese that leads him to the insight that such calendars are less concerned with what day it is than with "what kind" of day it is. This certainly holds true for the Chinese. One would not consider taking action in any phase of the construction of a new house without consulting an almanac and/or a specialist practitioner to determine if the stems and branches of a particular day or hour were auspicious for the activity or not. In addition, the stems and branches of the year, day and hour of birth of prospective brides and grooms were among the data examined in the calculations of "go-betweeners" (*mei ren* 媒人) in evaluating the suitability of marriages and in scheduling the successive ritual events necessary to consummate the match. While professional go-betweeners no longer purvey their services in Dongyang, the stems and branches of prospective brides and grooms are still exchanged, consulted, and interpreted during preliminary marriage considerations. The scheduling of ritual events associated with funerals also requires the determining of auspicious days and hours according to the permutational cycle of stems and branches.

The general issue of cyclical time conceptions is one that has been raised by Maurice BLOCH (1977). Bloch makes the materialist argument that all of humanity shares a universal perception of time that is above mystification by virtue of being linked to "nature as the subject of human activity." In his view, cyclic time frames are a form of mystification associated with hierarchical political orders, and they should not be misconstrued as a neutral item of culture. Bloch claims that Geertz has done exactly that in portraying the Balinese calendrical system. He argues that Geertz has confounded cognition with ideology, confounded the systems by which we know the world with the systems by which we hide it, mystify it, or express denial of its realities. Geertz has represented a form of Balinese ritual communication (which justifies as it obfuscates a distasteful hierarchical reality), as if it set the cognitive standard in all contexts, not just ritual ones. For Bloch, cyclic time frames should be recognized as instruments of political domination.

GELL wonders whether the perception of time as cyclic does not have a more naturalistic basis. He notes that "nature as a subject of human activity" is pervasively periodic, and that "There is ample evidence to suggest that concepts of duration are, in most agrarian societies, centered on periodicity and recurrence..." (1992, 84).

Paddy cultivation, in particular, pits man against nature and the inexorable passage of the seasons.... Demands which emanate from the nature of the cultigen, and the fact that it is being grown in an artificial environment rather than where it would occur naturally, place exceptional demands on labour resources and management skills at “life-crisis” stages in the life of the rice plant. (GELL 1992, 86)

At such moments, timing is of the essence.

Gell argues contra Bloch that the cyclical view of time is not, in origin, a ritual attitude, but an attitude which stems from a certain type of practicality, the practicality of the peasant or subsistence farmer (GELL 1992, 91). In such contexts, the recognition of recurrent cycles is critical to “practical” temporality.

It is not religious [or political] dogma, but the closed nature of the agricultural productive cycle, and the opportunity costs incurred by undue delay in completing the phases of this cycle, which focalize “recurrence” as the most salient feature of time in agrarian societies. There is nothing at all mystical about this, and it has nothing intrinsically to do with hierarchy. (GELL 1992, 85)

Farming anywhere in the world is a gamble, wherein the odds always favor those who can afford to plan in the longer term over those who are obliged to plan in the short term only. Exercising power in the peasant milieu is equivalent to having control over time, being able, in other words, to organize (i.e., schedule) the activities of a productive household so as not to be left behind by events, which proceed according to the inexorable but never entirely predictable timetable set by the interaction between seasonal weather conditions and the biological needs of the various crops. (GELL 1992, 89)

The peasant farmer, says GELL, is perpetually situated on the horns of some planning dilemma (1992, 89).

In the end, Gell agrees with Bloch in the conviction that human interaction with nature profoundly influences time cognition. But Gell insists that just as this interaction is by no means standardized neither can the form of its mystification be specified a priori. Different societies or social strata, operating under different ecological circumstances, employing different technologies and faced with different kinds of long-term and short-term planning problems, construct quite different cultural vocabularies for handling

temporal relationships (GELL 1992, 89).

Gell's analysis here calls to mind MEILLASSOUX's discussion of the agricultural cycle and the requirements its rhythms impose on households whose members cooperate in planting and harvesting (1978). While Gell argues that there is nothing about such rhythms that necessarily justifies the hierarchical political orders with which Bloch associates such time reckoning frames, Meillassoux's analysis associates the agricultural periodicity of peasant societies with a hierarchical ideology that posits the superiority of "those who came before" over "those who come after," and with an associated ancestral cult in the religious sphere that is its logical extension. While Meillassoux's analysis is based on the logic of his initial assumptions about the requirements of cooperation in agriculture, and seems to have been made in absence of reference to the Chinese data, his analysis so marvelously captures the central characteristics of Confucian ideology as to give it great credibility for Sinological studies. The veneration of the aged and the ancestral cult in China give concrete expression to Meillassoux's hypothesis about the general characteristics of agrarian states.

Thus while Gell criticizes Bloch for failing to note the cyclic character of "man's interaction with nature," and for failing to acknowledge that even within hierarchical societies there may be great variability in the way conceptions of time are related to the mystification of hierarchy, Meillassoux's analysis suggests that the cyclical character of man's interaction with nature under the constraints imposed by household cooperation in subsistence agriculture pre-adapts the human consciousness to perceive social reality hierarchically. If Bloch has overlooked the naturalistic basis for cyclical conceptions of time, Gell has perhaps been too quick in dismissing Bloch's association of cyclical time frames with the mystification of hierarchy.

THE SOLAR TERMS AND THE SCHEDULING OF AGRICULTURAL TASKS IN DONGYANG

In Dongyang County agricultural activity, the principal arena in which nature serves as the object of human action, is for the most part tied to twenty-four "solar terms" of fifteen days each (see Figure 1). The solar terms are anchored to the equinoxes and solstices, and correspond more precisely to seasonal changes than the months of the lunar year (FEI 1939, 146-48). The fifth of these solar terms, *qing ming*, is celebrated as a major festival, and the twenty-second, *dong zhi* (the winter solstice), is celebrated as a minor festival. (See Appendix for an account of the activities associated with each solar term.)

FIGURE 1: AGRICULTURAL CALENDAR—TWENTY-FOUR SOLAR TERMS

SPRING	AUTUMN
<i>li chun</i> 立春 beginning of spring (2/5)	<i>li qiu</i> 立秋 beginning of autumn (8/7)
<i>yu shui</i> 雨水 rain water (2/19)	<i>chu shu</i> 处暑 limit of heat (8/23)
<i>jing zhe</i> 惊蛰 waking of insects (3/5)	<i>bai lu</i> 白露 white dew (9/8)
<i>chun fen</i> 春分 vernal equinox (3/20)	<i>qiu fen</i> 秋分 autumnal equinox (9/23)
<i>qing ming</i> 清明 clear and bright (4/5)	<i>han lu</i> 寒露 cold dew (10/8)
<i>gu yu</i> 穀雨 grain rain (4/20)	<i>shuang jiang</i> 霜降 descent of frost (10/23)
SUMMER	WINTER
<i>li xia</i> 立夏 beginning of summer (5/6)	<i>li dong</i> 立冬 beginning of winter (11/7)
<i>xiao man</i> 小满 little full [grain] (5/21)	<i>xiao xue</i> 小雪 little snow (11/22)
<i>mang zhong</i> 芒种 grain in the ear (6/6)	<i>da xue</i> 大雪 big snow (12/7)
<i>xia zhi</i> 夏至 summer solstice (6/21)	<i>dong zhi</i> 冬至 winter solstice (12/21)
<i>xiao shu</i> 小暑 little heat (7/7)	<i>xiao han</i> 小寒 little cold (1/6)
<i>da shu</i> 大暑 big heat (7/23)	<i>da han</i> 大寒 big cold (1/21)

The spread of faster ripening hybrid rice varieties has introduced some basic changes in the cultivation system of Dongyang's irrigated fields (*tian* 田), and thus, in the scheduling of its various tasks among the twenty-four solar terms. The cultivation schedule of dry fields (*di* 地) has remained more or less unaffected, the most important change being a small portion of dry fields turned over to fruit orchards (MA n.d. and Figure 2).

The first irrigated rice crop is now planted earlier. Whereas traditionally seedlings were transplanted by *li xia* 立夏 (early May), the transplantation of early rice seedlings is now complete by *gu yu* 穀雨 (late April). Early rice is now harvested by *da shu* 大暑 (late July), so that the second crop of hybrid rice, replacing a crop of corn traditionally grown on irrigated fields after the first rice crop, can be planted before the end of the month.

Han lu 寒露 (early October), traditionally the time for harvest of both dry field crops (corn, millet, late broad beans) and corn planted on irrigated fields, remains the time of harvest for both dry field crops and irrigated rice at present. By *li dong* 立冬 (early November) wheat is planted in the dry fields, to be harvested the following spring by *xiao man* 小满 (middle of May).

Yields of the second rice crop of hybrid rice surpass those of the first rice crop, use about the same amount of fertilizer as the corn of the past, and require less labor than corn. The conversion to hybrid rice has thus reduced the labor requirements of the rural household, and increased the output of food (MA n.d.).

FIGURE 2: CULTIVATION SYSTEMS

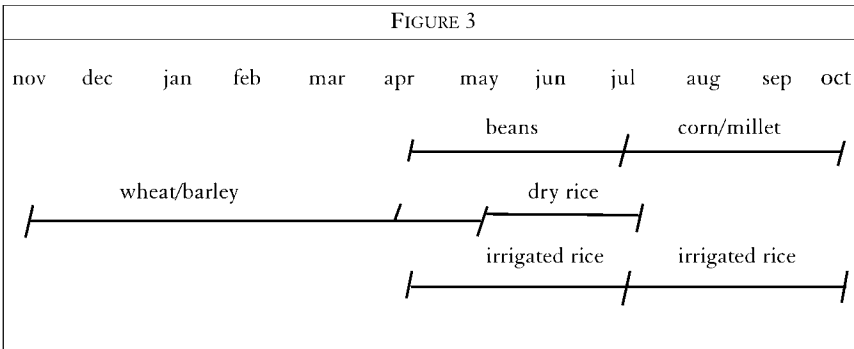
TRADITIONAL CULTIVATION SYSTEM					
Irrigated Fields			Dry Fields		
First Crop	Second Crop	Third Crop	First Crop	Second Crop	Third Crop
broad bean straw 16%	early rice 60%	corn 80%	wheat 100%	wheat bean (6 month bean) 80%	corn 60%
barley 66%					sweet potato millet 20%
rape seed 16%	middle/late rice glutinous rice 40%	autumn crops carrots 20%		cotton, peanut, vegetables 20%	
MODERN CULTIVATION SYSTEM					
Irrigated Fields			Dry Fields		
First Crop	Second Crop	Third Crop	First Crop	Second Crop	Third Crop
fallow 40%	early rice 85%	hybrid rice 80%	wheat 85%	white bean 60%	rice 40%
barley straw 40%					sweet potato millet 20%
broad bean 20%	watermelon 15%	glutinous rice late rice 20%		cotton, peanuts, vegetables 25%	
			orchards: tangerine, pear etc. 15%		

It has also made a number of adages relating to the solar terms anachronistic. In the old days it was said, “At *qing ming* one anticipates one’s grain; on the first day of summer, *li xia*, open the seedlings’ door” (*Qing ming liao gu zi, li xia kai yang men* 清明料谷籽, 立夏開秧門). The household that was the first in a village to begin transplanting seedlings was said to have “opened the seedlings’ door” (*kai yang men* 開秧門). Less punctual neighbors and friends would come out to help by planting a row, to offer congratulations. In the evening, the family which had “opened the door” would invite the neighbors in for wine, plums, sesame candy, and bean noodles as a way of thanking them for their help. This custom ceased during cooperativization in the 1950s, but has reappeared since the implementation of the household responsibility system in the 1980s (FSZ 1985, 8–9). However, with the adoption of early ripening varieties of rice, it is now said that “early rice

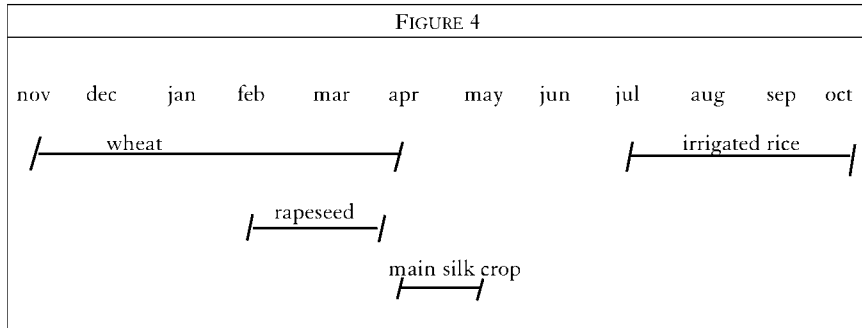
should not exceed *gu yu*" (the sixth solar term, ending April 20), and "opening the seedlings' door" now takes place before *li xia* (May 6) (FSZ 1985, 8).

It was said of the summer solstice (*xia zhi*) in Dongyang that it was a time when one could "see the grain girl" (*xia zhi jian dao niang* 夏至見稻娘), which was to say that at *xia zhi* one could just begin to see the earliest ears of grain in the rice fields. Early ripening varieties also make this adage anachronistic, since nowadays there are already many ears of grain visible by *xia zhi*.

To summarize the compilation of seasonal tasks represented in the Appendix, we might look to Litang Village, which at present adheres to the following schedule for planting and harvesting: Wheat or barley, planted in dry fields at *li dong* (the beginning of November), is harvested between *li xia* and *xiao man* (in early May). Beans are interplanted with the wheat at *chun fen* (early April) on dry fields, and harvested during *xiao shu* (early to mid July), when corn or millet is planted in the dry fields to be harvested at *han lu* (mid October). Rice is planted by *qing ming* (early April) in irrigated fields, and again at *li xia* (mid May) in dry fields in which wheat was earlier planted. Both rice crops are harvested together at *da shu* (late July). Rice is then immediately planted again in irrigated fields and harvested at *han lu* (mid October). With minor variations due to differing topography, this schedule is characteristic of villages in Dongyang's second economic zone (see above).



This compares interestingly with the agricultural cycle of Kaihsienkung (Gaixiangong) in Jiangsu Province described by FEI in 1939 (see Figure 4 based on FEI 1939, 152–53).



SYNOPTIC ILLUSION OR SYMBOLIC CAPITAL

An important part of Pierre BOURDIEU's critique of the structuralist method (1977) is the claim that structuralism fails to adequately come to terms with the issues of time and timing. Bourdieu is critical of past compilations of calendrical regularities by anthropologists, in which the very process of elicitation "invite[s] the interrogatee to adopt a quasi-theoretical attitude," and presupposes a "totalizing" response (BOURDIEU 1977, 106). The anthropologist creates an illusory synopsis, and then reifies it as structural. For Bourdieu, such totalizing synopses are inadequate because they eliminate strategy from consideration.

In his study of the Kabyle, he attempts to demonstrate that the calendar does not constitute a chronometrical scheme imposed on the scheduling of Kabyle life from without, but rather serves as a device for recognizing agrarian events as they loom up in the present, as they pass, and as they are left behind (BOURDIEU 1977, 105).

Now as regards the activities appropriate to the periods marked by the solar terms in Dongyang, they were indeed presented to me in synoptic form (MA n.d.); and, as Bourdieu predicted, they came to me in that form as the result of an elicitation which "invited the interrogatee to adopt a quasi-theoretical attitude," and presupposed a "totalizing" response (BOURDIEU 1977, 106).

However, GELL takes issue with Bourdieu who, in his zeal to avoid the structuralist "synoptic illusion," excludes the possibility that calendrical knowledge in totalized, represented form is an exceptionally important form of "symbolic capital" (1992, 305).

While the calendar may not dictate practice, reference to it helps practitioners to keep track of "how well they are doing in relation to the totality of productive tasks which have to be accomplished throughout the year. By monitoring advances and lags, they know when extra effort may be required,

or when they can afford to relax" (GELL 1992, 304).

The calendar is hence a system for the "continuous production of socially useful knowledge" (GELL 1992, 304).

I would argue that at least for the Chinese who are no strangers to totalizing and systematizing taxonomies (as materials in FSZ 1984 make clear), the cumulated knowledge encapsulated in the presentation or representation of the synoptic solar terms is no mere illusion created by the circumstance of elicitation. Systematic knowledge of agricultural activities appropriate to the periods of the twenty-four solar terms represents a summary of the local experience of recurrence in human interaction with nature, and as such is part of the "symbolic capital" that the Chinese farmer controls in his annual struggle with the elements (FEI 1939, 144). This summary, moreover, is ever evolving, and has been susceptible to revision under changing technological and organizational ("practical") conditions.

This is not an argument that undermines the general applicability of practice theory, but it does suggest that perhaps Bourdieu's conclusions with respect to the "synoptic" representation of time, which were derived from his study of the Kabyle, are over-generalized or over-drawn.

CODA: ON CALENDARS AS INSTRUMENTS OF POLITICAL DOMINATION

Having thus far argued for the importance of synoptic calendars as a form of symbolic capital, something also needs to be said about calendars and political control. RUTZ is clearly on the right track when he argues that, "whatever the different times they represent and measure, calendars reflect the demands of political elites on the widest body politic" (1992, 6). "Planners who control instruments of time control labor power." As a tributary extractive structure, the state is a "direct instrument of time-discipline" (1992, 8).

Pelliot points out that "Not for nothing did the ancient Chinese bureaucrats say, when they had incorporated some new region into the empire, that its inhabitants had 'received the calendar'" (quoted in GELL 1992, 313).

In these examples, we encounter the calendar as a metaphor, euphemism even, for political control and domination. But perhaps we should be careful about mistaking the metaphor for the reality it invokes. Perhaps, to turn Rutz on his head, we might say that it is the planners claim on the produce of the labor power (tribute) that gives them control over the laborer's time; the implied causality is differently interpreted. Control of time does not yield political power; it is the other way around. Because control of time is associated with political power, it is possible to use control of time as a metaphor to express or mystify political control.

Or perhaps what we have here is a restatement of the primeval quid pro

quo of early civilization—a trade off of “symbolic capital” (the reliability and predictability of organized calendrical knowledge, measure of the seasons, and hydraulic control), in exchange for political subordination and tribute in a hierarchical political order, the mystification of which was already immanent in consciousness in terms of those who came before having precedence over those who came after.

In any event, this leads me to the equivocal conclusion that while synoptic calendars are clearly instruments of symbolic capital in the hands of the peasant farmer in his struggle with the elements, “the” calendar itself is simultaneously a metaphor for the claim on the product of his labor power by a higher power.

NOTES

1. This paper combines materials on the annual cycle of agricultural activities gathered in Dongyang County during 1988 and 1989. The materials include a synoptic calendar elicited from Mr. Ma Yirui of Huailu Township (MA n.d.), the *Dongyang fengsu zhi* (a compendium of folk habit and custom compiled by the local county Cultural Bureau [FSZ 1985]), and my own fieldnotes.

2. While the percentage of rural income derived from agriculture is declining, it continues to constitute the subsistence by which the rural working class reproduces itself. Entrepreneurs are thus able to take advantage of this situation to keep labor costs down.

APPENDIX

ACTIVITIES ASSOCIATED WITH THE TWENTY-FOUR SOLAR TERMS

SPRING

LI CHUN 立春 “BEGINNING OF SPRING” (2/5)

The agricultural year, as it is generally conceived, starts in the spring, and the first of the twenty-four solar terms is so named, *li chun*. Its occurrence is often very close to lunar New Year’s Eve, which accounts in part for the name “Spring Festival” (*chunjie* 春節), which the Chinese communist government has adopted for the lunar New Year’s holiday.

On the day before *li chun* in late imperial times in Dongyang County, local officials would lead their constituents out into the eastern suburbs of the county town to welcome spring. A clay figure of a spring ox and its driver (*chun niu mang shen* 春牛芒神) was ceremonially smashed, and the servants of local scholars would scramble to retrieve the pieces of paper that fell from the figure to divine whether the coming year would be lucky or not (DYXXLJS 1910, 64).

On the day of *li chun*, local officials would offer sacrifice to *sui xing* 歲星, the planet Jupiter (the star which presides over the year), and carry out the spring rituals. Wine and food offerings were prepared in sacrifice to the earth spirit *tu shen* 土神, so as to “make spring lucky” (*zuo chun fu* 作春福; DYXXLJS 1910, 64).

Nowadays, on the day before *li chun*, rural families compete in “carrying winter water.” It is commonly said that for cutting winter grain candy (*dong mi tang* 冬米糖) and preparing gelled fish or gelled meat, “winter water” is quite indispensable, and the day before the first day of spring is the last time winter water can be obtained (FSZ 1985, 110).

On the morning of *li chun*, all households set off fireworks to “welcome spring,” and green vegetables are eaten to “sample spring.” After eating, the old and young “seek out spring” by going out to the suburbs to hunt for and snap off branches of Chinese evergreen trees. They break off the branches and return home where the branches are inserted at the door, in a custom called “inserting spring.” If the village has no Chinese evergreens, other varieties of pine or cypress, both symbols of longevity, may be substituted. Pine and cypress branches are also plated into crowns and worn on the head in a custom known as “wearing of the spring” (FSZ 1985, 110).

The fourteen-day period from *li chun* to the next solar term of *yu shui* “rain water” (2/19) is a time to plant potatoes, hoe up weeds in the wheat fields, inspect the seedlings there, and apply spring fertilizer as required. In the wheat and barley fields, close attention is paid to cleaning ditches and draining water, so as to avoid the seedlings turning “water yellow” where water accumulates (MA n.d.).

YU SHUI 雨水 “RAIN WATER” (2/19)

Yu shui was never marked by any particular observances in Dongyang.

JING ZHE 惊蛰 “WAKING OF INSECTS” (3/5)

Jing zhe was observed by “listening for thunder” to divine the fortunes of the year: “At *jing zhe*, one sound of thunder, [and] the crops are ready to grow and mature quickly.” If there is no thunder, then the year will be an unlucky one (FSZ 1985, 110–11).

At the start of *jing zhe*, rural folk would go out of the village to dig up “shepherd’s purse,” “cotton weed,” and other wild herbs to eat. To eat such herbs before *jing zhe* would cause one to go deaf, but if eaten on the day itself, deafness could be cured. If eaten after this day, one’s hearing and sight would be improved (FSZ 1985, 111).

During this two-week period rice seedling beds are turned over, plowed, and prepared. Early rice seeds are dried, soaked, and sprouted in preparation for their planting by stages and in batches after *chun fen* “vernal equinox” on 3/20. Sweet potato sprouts are also selected and planted (MA n.d.).

CHUN FEN 春分 “VERNAL EQUINOX” (3/20)

The two-week period beginning with *chun fen*, is the time for the planting of early rice seedlings. It is said that “if the first ripening is early, then all the ripenings will be early, and if all the ripenings are early, then the harvests will be good” (*yi shu zao, shu shu zao; shu shu zao, shu shu hao* 一熟早, 熟熟早; 熟熟早, 熟熟好). *Chun fen* is also a time when the pear flowers blossom and when white beans (sixth-month bean) are interplanted in the wheat fields (MA n.d.).

QING MING 清明 “CLEAR AND BRIGHT” (4/5)

In late imperial times, *qing ming* was a festival when the ancestors were worshiped at home, at their grave sites, and in the ancestral halls (*citang* 祠堂) of the various branches of the lineage *zu* 族.

The worship in the main ancestral hall (*zong citang* 宗祠堂) involved the entire lineage. The hall keepers would “open the gate” and men and women, old and young would gather in the central hall (*tang* 堂) to collectively worship the lineage ancestors.

In Litang Village during this era the worshipping of ancestors during *qing ming* took

place in stages over twelve days. Only the educated, in those days men with a primary school education, participated in the actual worship, since they were able to read the words and chant (*nian* 念) appropriately.

Nine days before *qing ming*, worship began in the main ancestral hall of the Zhangs in Tuotang (the traditional name for a segment of the present county town of Wuning). Worship of the most remote ancestors (of generations Kang 康 to Ren 仁, four generations in the lineage poem) took place at the main hall over three days. It took a day to travel back from the county town to Litang Village. There at the branch hall in Lu Zhuang Village where Litang Village's more immediate ancestors lived just before settling in Litang, the worship of the Shen 圣 generation, Yi 义 generation, Zhong 忠 and He 和 generations took place from the fifth to the seventh days.

On the eighth and ninth day, worship of the Xiao 孝, You 友, and Mu 睦 generations was conducted in Litang itself. On *qing ming* day (the tenth day of worship) the Yuan 渊 generation was commemorated. On the eleventh day, the day after *qing ming*, the Ren 任 generation was commemorated, and on the twelfth day the Xu 恤 generation, which is within a generation or two of people living in Litang today, was commemorated.

To worship in Tuotang, one was carried in a sedan chair and given 100 copper coins. When the ceremonies at the central ancestral hall were concluded, one was rewarded with five catties of pork from the hall, and two copper coins. When the worship in Lu Zhuang was concluded, one also received a gift of pork, a somewhat smaller portion (fieldnotes 6/18/88 Litang Village, Zhang Fude interview).

"Longevity pork" (*chang ming rou* 長命肉) was distributed to the elders of the lineage as well. Those 70 years old would receive one *jin*; those 80 years old, two *jin*; those 90 years old, three *jin*; those 100 years old, a whole pig, in accord with the Confucian prescription to nurture the elderly *yang lao* 養老 (Guozhai fieldnotes 6/23/88).

Sacrificial foods included a whole pig, a whole goat, and a whole chicken, and an assortment of bean sprouts, bean curd, and *qing ming* "fruits." When the sacrifices were complete at each locale, the descendants would divide the remains of the sacrifice, and set a feast for the branch hall members. The spectacle was great, the ceremony solemn.

Seating at the banquets was in generational order according to one's place in the lineage (*zhao mu* 昭穆) sequence, regardless of actual age. Rich and poor sat together, and youngsters served the tea. Any problems requiring the passing of sentence, according to lineage regulations, were usually discussed by the elders of the senior generation and local prestigious persons.

Bean sprouts, bean curd, and *qing ming* "fruits" (*guo* 果) are still consumed by rural households during *qing ming*. In the middle of the day, women and children carry baskets out to the outskirts of the village, to gather fleabane and shepherd's purse. These are brought back and cut up into a dough to make the green fruits. They are often made in the shape of a dustpan, and called "dustpan fruits," but there are also "fruits" in the shape of domesticated animals "qing ming goat," "qing ming dog," etc. Eating "qing ming fruits" is said to give one sharp hearing and keen sight, and to make one clever and intelligent (FSZ 1985, 104).

On *qing ming* day, villagers still visit the graves of their ancestors to "sweep the graves." Rural families dig up the grass at the base of the graves, and pile it on top of the grave mound, "adding earth." Adding earth must be done in an odd number of clumps, to emphasize the influence of yang 陽 elements and counteract the yin 陰 of death. On top of the clumps, paper money is inserted, and white paper cut into strips is used to "mark the grave" (FSZ 1985, 104). Planting trees on the path leading to the graves, glorifying the ancestors' names with inscriptions, changing the direction of the paths to the grave, are also carried out on this day.

Beginning with the establishment of the People's Republic in 1949, it became custom-

ary for young people from various parts of the county to make the rounds of the “graves of the revolutionary martyrs,” carrying out ritual sweeping of the graves, exchanging steamed buns (*hua juan* 花卷), holding meetings, and carrying out education about revolutionary traditions (FSZ 1985, 104). Such activities have gradually declined since the onset of economic reforms in the late 1970s and early 1980s.

It was customary for rural children to go into the hay fields on *qing ming* day and gather hay flowers (purple cloud flowers). Plaited together with silk thread into crowns, and worn across the forehead, they displayed their wearer’s skill and cleverness and resisted misfortune (FSZ 1985, 103).

Because *qing ming* sounds like *cong ming* 聰明 “smart,” the festival was a particularly auspicious day to give birth to a son. A son so born was known as a “*qing ming* son.” To be born on the day before *qing ming*, however, was to forever be dubbed a “dim wit,” written off and subject to ridicule. Families who inopportunistically bore children on the day before *qing ming* would often keep silent, concealing the event from lineage members and neighbors until the following day. Down to the present, it is still customary to avoid going out to visit neighbors and friends on the day before *qing ming*, especially those households in which a woman may be pregnant (FSZ 1985, 105).

In late imperial times literati and scholars would go out to the suburbs on *qing ming* to “tread on the green” (DYXXLJS 1910, 67), but nowadays such “spring outings” are more often organized by schools or work units, and usually involve a visit to one of the scenic spots or places of historic interest in or near the county. The town of Fang Yan in neighboring Yong Kang County, site of the Hu Gong temple, is a common destination for Dongyang spring outings, as are Eight Face Mountain, East White Mountain, the Stone Cave Academy, and the caves of Pingyan and Baiyun within Dongyang’s borders (FSZ 1985, 103–104).

Planting willow slips (*cha liu* 插柳) near the doorway of one’s house, or at the back of the house, near the water’s edge or on the roadside is also customary on *qing ming*. It is said that sprigs planted on this day will take root with great facility, so *qing ming* is also known as a tree planting festival (*zhi shu jie* 植樹節; FSZ 1985, 103).

In traditional times spring planting began soon after *qing ming*, so most rural households were busy drying seed, repairing agricultural tools, and preparing to plant soy beans. To insure a good grain harvest, on *qing ming* day offerings of the three animals (pig, goat, and chicken) would be prepared, incense and candles lit, and a sacrifice conducted in which one “made a vow” (*xu yuan* 許愿) to the spirits of the five grains. It was said that a family that had done so could count on a smooth plowing and a fine growth and maturation of its grain crop (FSZ 1985, 105).

Early in the morning on *qing ming* day, in many places in the county, those households with water buffaloes or oxen lead them out of their pens, one at a time, in search of grass to feed on. The household that is the first out with its animals has “snatched the green,” and can count on good fortune during the coming year. In some areas when a buffalo or ox snatches the green, it earns the privilege of being let into the hay fields to graze, regardless of whose fields they are, without fear of rebuke. It is said that the draft animal that snatches the green on this day, will be strengthened for the balance of the year. After *qing ming*, the care of the animals was traditionally moved from a pen attached to the house to the fields outside, in anticipation of the imminent spring ploughing (FSZ 1985, 103).

Nowadays at *qing ming*, all planting of early rice seedlings should already be completed. The two-week period following *qing ming* is marked by the ventilation of the seedling beds to toughen the seedlings and control for insects, the planting of summer vegetables (pumpkin, towel gourd, bottle gourd, eggplant, tomatoes, etc.), and the planting of peanuts, sugar cane, taro, and dark cowpeas.

GU YU 穀雨 “GRAIN RAIN” (4/20)

Gu yu is the period during which cotton is planted, assuredly before the commencement of the next solar term, *li xia* (5/6). *Gu yu* is also a time of caring for sweet potato seedlings, and for hoeing up weeds and spreading ashes on the white beans (sixth-month beans). During the final ten days of *gu yu* the transplanting of early rice seedlings from their seedling beds into the fields is carried out. It is said in Dongyang that “cowpeas planted in the third [lunar] month relieve the famine in the sixth” (*san yue zhong jiang, liu yue jiu huang* 三月種豇, 六月救荒) and that “if you want cotton, [it must be planted] before *li xia*” (*ruo yao mian, li xia qian* 若要棉, 立夏前).

SUMMER

LI XIA 立夏 “BEGINNING OF SUMMER” (5/6)

During the first ten days of *li xia* wheat and barley are harvested, and fields are immediately reploughed. Close attention is paid to the transplanted early rice seedlings. Fertilizer and insecticides are applied to the fields, and weeding is carried out.

In the old days it was said, “At *qing ming* one anticipates one’s grain, on the first day of summer (*li xia*), open the seedlings’ door” (*qing ming liao gu zi, li xia kai yang men* 清明料穀籽, 立夏開秧門). The household that was the first in a village to begin transplanting seedlings was said to have “opened the seedlings’ door” (*kai yang men* 開秧門; see main text above). However, with the adoption of early ripening varieties of rice, it is now said that “early rice should not exceed ‘grain rain’ (*gu yu*)” (4/20; the sixth solar term), and “opening the door of the seedlings” now takes place before *li xia*, making the adage quoted above anachronistic (FSZ 1985, 8).

Men and women, old and young all avoid sitting in doorways on *li xia*, since it is said that this will cause one’s hands to be acidic and one’s feet to be soft for the whole year. The custom of old was for children to have their hair cut in order of their birth, for adult men to shave their faces, for women to trim their eyebrows and pierce their ears, and for the household to pierce the noses of young cows. Village households would hang out a big scale for villagers to weigh themselves, and the custom persists today using modern scales (FSZ 1985, 111).

At dawn of *li xia*, in areas near the mountains, families would go up into the mountains to gather bamboo shoots. At noon on *li xia*, these were mixed with salted vegetables, cooked and eaten, and were said to make one’s arms and legs light and strong.

XIAO MAN 小滿 “LITTLE FULL [GRAIN]” (5/21)

The two-week period initiated by *xiao man* is one in which wheat is harvested, and its stubble and weeds hoed up for the benefit of the white beans. Potatoes are harvested and sweet potato cuttings are taken. It is said in Dongyang, “One hundred days after *li chun*, all households will have harvested their barley” (*chun guo bai, jia jia you da mai* 春過百, 家家有大麥).

MANG ZHONG 芒種 “GRAIN IN THE EAR” (6/6)

The two-week period following *mang zhong* is one of intensified management of early rice fields, with measures taken to prevent a variety of blights and infestations. “High yield (bumper crop) ditches” (*feng chan gou* 豐產溝) are opened, water released, and the fields rested (*ge tian* 攏田), left to bake in the sun (*kao tian* 烤田). Continued cutting of sweet potatoes is carried out, and should be finished before the next solar term, *xia zhi* (MA n.d.).

Within a few days of *mang zhong*, one begins sowing the seeds and growing seedlings (*yu yang* 育秧) of the different varieties of hybrid rice, “by stages and in batches” in preparation for the second wet rice crop. In the past, “raising rice seedlings” (*yu yang*) was carried out on wet paddies. Since cooperativization, seedlings have generally been raised dry, or half dry.

After the seedlings have been planted, they are covered with a frame of bamboo strips, and more recently with nylon sheets, to prevent harm from birds and wind. When the sprouts turn green or the temperature turns warm, the cover is removed. Two or three days before pulling up the seedlings for transplanting, fertilizer is applied, and grass and wood ashes are spread on the field. This application is called *qi shen fei* 起身肥, literally, “raise the body fertilizer” (FSZ 1985, 8).

XIA ZHI 夏至 “SUMMER SOLSTICE” (6/21)

Xia zhi comes about a half month from the sowing of rice seedlings, and several days thereafter the seedlings must be moved (*ji yang* 寄秧) to a new bed (the second stage of *yu yang*), and insecticide applied to the seedling bed every day for seven to ten days. At the end of the period, glutinous rice (*nuo mi* 糯米) seeds are sown.

As was noted above, it was said in Dongyang that one could “see the grain maiden” at *xia zhi*, but that early ripening varieties of rice also make this adage anachronistic.

Traditionally on *xia zhi* a ceremony of sacrifice to Tian-gong 田公 and Tian-po 田婆 (grandfather and grandmother of the fields) was carried out (FSZ 1985, 111). The Dongyang County gazetteer at the time of the emperor Dao Guang (1821–1851) notes that in worshipping the grandmother and grandfather of the field and in a request for protection from the vagaries of the elements during the coming months, wine and meat were offered in sacrifice to effigies made of bound up straw, which were inserted in the field near the opening of drainage ditches where the grandfather and grandmother of the field were said to reside (FSZ 1985, 9).

On the evening of *xia zhi*, it is customary for rural families to “roll up wheat cakes.” They prepare thin wheat flour pancakes and serve them with a variety of green vegetables, bean pods, bean curd, or cured meat to be wrapped in the pancakes and eaten. The cakes are also exchanged between the households of relatives and neighbors in celebration of the “joyful [literally drunken] summer” (*zui xia* 醉夏).

XIAO SHU 小暑 “LITTLE HEAT” (7/7)

Xiao shu is marked by the final period of field management of early rice. One takes measures to prevent “high temperature forced ripening” (*gao wen bi shu* 高温逼熟) and to deal with a variety of insect pests. One spreads fertilizer and hoes up weeds in the fields where sweet potatoes are grown. During the first ten days of *xiao shu* corn and millet are planted in the dry fields. When three leaves appear on the corn seedlings, fertilizer is spread, weeds are hoed up, and gaps in the rows filled in with seeds.

Xiao shu is also a time to harvest white beans, and to “begin with the sickle” (*kai lian* 開鎌), that is, to harvest early rice. In preparation for *kai lian*, traditionally, one took five ripe rice ears and inserted them in a bowl of cooked rice. Placed alongside various prepared foods, they were taken to the fields and presented in worship to the spirits of the five grains. Only then did one begin cutting. In some places in the county, less elaborate preparations were made, and only joss paper and incense burned. Upon completion of *kai lian* the fields are immediately turned over to transplant hybrid rice seedlings (FSZ 1985, 10).

DA SHU 大暑 “BIG HEAT” (7/23)

Da shu is a period during which every minute and second is critical. It is said that

If you get your hybrid rice planted within two days of *da shu*, you will have a bountiful harvest; if you get your hybrid rice planted within eight days of *da shu*, you will have an OK harvest; if you don’t get your hybrid rice planted until sometime thereafter, you will have a poor harvest.

It is also said that “At *xiao shu* some households will already have harvested white beans. At *da shu* every household has harvested early rice, and all already have new grain” (MA n.d.).

AUTUMN

LI QIU 立秋 “BEGINNING OF AUTUMN” (8/7)

In late imperial times rents were due three days after *li qiu*, just after the completion of the rice harvest. Nowadays, a second crop of rice is already in the ground, and the obligations of rural cultivators to the state have already been settled. Weeding of autumn dry field crops (corn, millet) is performed, fertilizer applied, and furrows raised for sweet potatoes. Fertilizer is applied to hybrid rice fields, and careful application of pesticides is critical at this time. But water regulation is less important at this juncture, since hybrid rice can go without water for ten days to half a month after planting without affecting its productivity.

CHU SHU 处暑 “LIMIT OF HEAT” (8/23)

With the advent of *chu shu*, one begins growing seedlings for autumn crops (rapeseed, *wu ke cai* 烏殼菜, etc.).

BAI LU 白露 “WHITE DEW” (9/8)

Bai lu is a period in which rapeseed and other autumn crops are transplanted. The majority of the autumn crops should be in the ground on or near the time of *bai lu*. It is said that “high foot” cabbage should be planted first, carrots thereafter.

Hybrid rice is in the ear and flowering, and the consistency and level of the water in the paddy must be carefully regulated. Pesticides are applied to hybrid rice. It is said in Dongyang that “At *chu shu* one plants buckwheat, at *bai lu* one plants vegetables; the grass seed needs the water of the eighth lunar month, by the ninth month it's late” (*chu shu qiao mai, bai lu cai; cao zi yao shi ba yue shui, daole juyue jiu chi le* 处暑蕎麦, 白露菜; 草子要食八月水, 到了九月, 就遲了).

QIU FEN 秋分 “AUTUMNAL EQUINOX” (9/23)

During *qiu fen*, grass seed (“purple cloud flower” [milk vetch], a bean plant used for fodder) is planted, and “winter vegetables” (e.g., rapeseed, *wu ke cai*, nine head vegetable, Chinese broccoli) are maturing.

HAN LU 寒露 “COLD DEW” (10/8)

During *han lu*, one begins harvesting sweet potatoes. First a small quantity at a time is harvested to serve as fodder for the pigs and water buffalo. By the end of the month all are harvested, processed, and preserved. *Han lu* marks the final period of managing the hybrid rice crop, when the application of pesticides is most important. The harvest of hybrid rice and glutinous rice begins as does the harvest of dry field crops (e.g., corn, millet, late big beans).

SHUANG JIANG 霜降 “DESCENT OF FROST” (10/23)

Shuang jiang is marked by the planting of wheat in dry fields. A portion of irrigated fields is planted in barley at this time. “High foot” cabbage is harvested and cured in salt. *Dong cai* 冬菜 (“winter vegetables,” e.g., mustard greens and cabbages) are also transplanted at this time.

On the evening before *shuang jiang*, the old custom was for peasant households to set up an altar at the side of the field and offer sacrifices to heaven and earth, to pray that there would be no frost on the next day. It was said that “if frost does not descend on *shuang jiang*, there will be eighteen more days of warmth.”

At this time in the dry fields on the hills, most of the corn is not yet ripe. If there is frost,

there will be a poor harvest. During the sacrifice rice straw, wheat stalks, sticks, and garbage are burned. Smoke fills the air, and sometimes the fires, which are intended to “expel the frost ghost,” last till the following dawn (FSZ 1985, 111).

WINTER

LI DONG 立冬 “BEGINNING OF WINTER” (11/7)

At *li dong* winter planting of wheat and barley should be complete. Early applications of fertilizer are made to wheat and barley fields. Carrots and other vegetables are harvested and the fields replanted with wheat. It is said in Dongyang that “planting wheat should be finished before the passing of *li dong*.” *Li dong* also marks the beginning of the ham curing season, which continues till *da han*, the last solar term of the year.

XIAO XUE 小雪 “LITTLE SNOW” (11/22)

Xiao xue is not marked by any particular activity in the county. The agricultural slack season has set in.

DA XUE 大雪 “BIG SNOW” (12/7)

Da xue is a time when fertilizer is spread on winter crop fields, and furrows are mounded up between the rows to prevent frost damage. Fertilizer consisting of straw and wood ash is also spread on fields of grass seed to prevent dry frost, and if it is an extremely dry year, the fields should be irrigated once to prevent frost damage.

DONG ZHI 冬至 “WINTER SOLSTICE” (12/21)

The customs of *dong zhi* are similar to those of *qing ming*, although usually carried out on a smaller scale. Old and young all worship at the graves of the ancestors. In the evening a sacrifice is set for the ancestors, and each family prepares sesame paste cakes and sugared plums to eat and exchange with the neighbors. The custom of eating sesame paste cakes and sugared plums at the winter solstice is associated with capturing their “pliability” or “toughness,” since one is about to enter the dead of winter, when if one’s health is not strong, it will be difficult to survive.

There is a proverb: “If you don’t eat sesame paste cakes, you haven’t celebrated winter solstice.” It is also said, “If you don’t celebrate the winter solstice, it will be a cold season” (FSZ 1985, 111–12).

XIAO HAN 小寒 “LITTLE COLD” (1/6)

On *xiao han*, winter crops are harvested, ditches are cleaned, and water drained from the fields.

DA HAN 大寒 “BIG COLD” (1/21)

The last solar term, *da han*, is not marked by any particular observances, although preparations for lunar New Year’s have usually begun by this time.

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